

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

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AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3138

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE NATIONALIST AND LIBERAL PARTIES ARE COMPLETING THEIR NEGOTIATIONS AIMED AT CRADTING A "CONSTITUTIONAL FRONT" TO OPPOSE THE DE FACTO MILITARY REGIME OF GENERAL OSWALDO LOPEZ ARELLANO. THEY HOPE TO JOIN FORCES WITH THE DISSATISFIED PORTION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN AN ATTEMPT TO CONVINCE THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT THAT LOPEZ'S REGIME IS INCOMPETENT AND INCAPABLE OF GOVERNING PROPERLY. THEIR ASSUMPTION IS THAT THE MILITARY WILL PRESSURE LOPEZ INTO CHANGING THIS PRESENT CABINET AND EVERNTUALLY FORCE HIM TO CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POLITICAL COMMISSIONS OF THE NATIONALIST AND LIBERAL PARTIES HAVE BEEN MEETING ON A CONTINUING BASIS IN AN ATTEMPT TO CREATE A UNITED FRONT AGAINST THE DE FACTO MILITARY REGIME OF GENERAL LOPEZ. THE COMMISSIONS WERE CREATED AFTER THE PARTY CONVENTIONS EARLIER THIS YEAR TO REORGANIZE THE INTERNAL PARTY STRUCTURES AND TO NEGOTIATE WITH EACH OTHER. THE PARTY STRONGMEN, RICARDO ZUNIGA
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AUGUSTINUS OF THE NATIONALISTS AND MODESTO RODAS ALVARADO OF THE

LIBERALS ARE ACTIVE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS OF THE COMMISSIONS AND ARE HOPEFUL THAT A UNITED FRONT CAN BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE NEAR FUTURE.

2. THE GREATEST PROBLEM FACING THE COMMISSIONS IN COMING TO AN AGREEMENT WAS A DIFFERENCE IN THE TACTICAL STRATEGY ENVISIONED BY EACH GROUP. THE LIBERALS WANTED TO ENLARGE THE "CONSTITUTIONAL FRONT" TO MAKE IT INCLUDE OTHER UNREGISTERED PARTIES SUCH AS THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT AND THE INNOVATION AND UNITY PARTY. THE NATIONALISTS WERE RELUCTANT TO ENLARGE THE FRONT BEYOND THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES BUT EVENTUALLY AGREED TO THE LIBERAL DEMAND.

3. POLOFF HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE GENERAL POLITICAL SITUATION WITH RAFEL BARDALES BUESO, PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONALIST PARTY ON JULY 24. BARDALES IS CONVINCED THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE UPPER LEVELS OF THE MILITARY ARE DIS-ILLUSIONED BY THE FAILINGS OF THE REGIME BUT THAT THEY ARE NOT UNITED ABOUT HOW TO PROCEED. HE BELIEVES LOPEZ STILL CAN COUNT ON THE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY BECAUSE THEY ARE UNABLE TO AGREE ON ANY OTHER MILITARY LEADER TO HEAD THE GOVERNMENT. HE REMARKED THAT ONE WAY OUT OF THE SITUATION WOULD BE FOR LOPEZ TO CHANGE HIS PRESENT TECHNOCRATIC CABINET FOR A POLITICAL CABINET AND CALL FOR ELECTIONS. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY WOULD BE FOR LOPEZ TO ALLOW A JUNTA TO TAKE OVER UNTIL ELECTIONS COULD BE HELD. HE EMPHASIZED THAT MOST POLITICANS, INCLUDING HIMSELF, DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENT REGIME WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE IN POWER FOR MORE THAN ANOTHER YEAR AND A HALF.

4. IN A RECENT EXCHANGE WITH CORRESPONDENTS LOPEZ STATED THAT HE HAS NO DESIRE TO BE PRESIDENT OR CHIEF OF STATE AND THAT HE HAD NEVER OPPOSED A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY. ON THE OTHER HAND HE SAID THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAD STATED THEY WOULD RULE FOR A MINIMUM OF FIVE YEARS WHEN THEY TOOK POWER IN DECEMBER, 1972. OBVIOUSLY, HE WAS SAYING THAT HIS BURDEN OF LEADERSHIP HAD BEEN THRUST UPON HIM BY THE ARMED FORCES AND THAT HE IS GOVERNING OUT OF A SENSE OF DUTY RATHER THAN FROM GREED FOR POWER.

5. COMMENT: THE POLITICAL PARTIES ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN A CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT THE LOPEZ REGIME, BOTH INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY. THEY HOPE TO FORM A UNITED FRONT WITH THE DISSATISFIED PORTION OF THE

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PRIVATE SECTOR TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE REGIME. AT PRESENT THE COUNTRY IS SUFFERING FROM INCREASING INFLATION AND ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AND MANY SOCIAL GROUPS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH WHAT THEY VIEW AS THE SLOW PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN. THE POLITICAL PARTY LEADERSHIP BELIEVES THAT THE ACCUMULATION OF PROBLEMS AND DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT WILL EVENTUALLY FORCE LOPEZ INTO CHANGING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENTAL APPARATUS WHILE CONVOKING ELECTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THEIR BELIEF IS BASED ON

THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE OFFICER CORPS IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY
DISENCHANTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS AND THAT IT WILL BE
THE MAJOR FACTOR IN FORCING LOPEZ TO OPT FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL

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